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# THE ETHNOBOTANY OF A MESTIZO VILLAGE

Christina A. Pereira

*The study of ethnobotany examines the role plants play in a society. In many subsistence-based agricultural societies plants provide a variety of resources for the subsistence of the people, including food, medicine, tools, and adornment. This paper examines the manner in which members of a Mexican mestizo village utilized local plants in their daily lives. Data is drawn from an ethnographic field school research during the summer of 1995 in the ejido Emilio Carranza, near the town of Los Rayon in the Mexican state of Nuevo Leon. Residents classified plants in four broad categories, and maintained many of the most useful species in household gardens. The most diverse class of plants were in the category of medicinal herbs used by curanderas (female herbalists). Where possible, local Spanish or Indigenous names are cross-referenced in the Linnaean taxonomic classification system.*

**During** the summer of 1995, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln conducted a field school in ethnography under the direction of Emilia Gonzalez-Clements and L. Davis Clements. The field school was situated in a small agrarian village in northeastern Mexico where our professors had pursued research in previous years. We spent nearly three weeks in Mexico learning ethnographic fieldwork methods. Each student was responsible for selecting a topic of interest and interviewing members of the local population.

I chose to conduct an ethnobotanical study to learn how the residents of this *mestizo* [persons of mixed Indigenous and European ancestry] village utilized plants in their daily lives. My primary research interest

was in identifying plants the local population employed for food, medicine, and tools. I was also interested in the methods used to obtain these plants, and whether the plants grew in the wild or were cultivated species. Research did not focus on staple field crops, such as corn (*Zea mays*), cultivated by the local population. Due to the short time spent in Mexico only a brief ethnobotanical overview of the village can be presented. A glossary of Spanish and botanical names is attached.

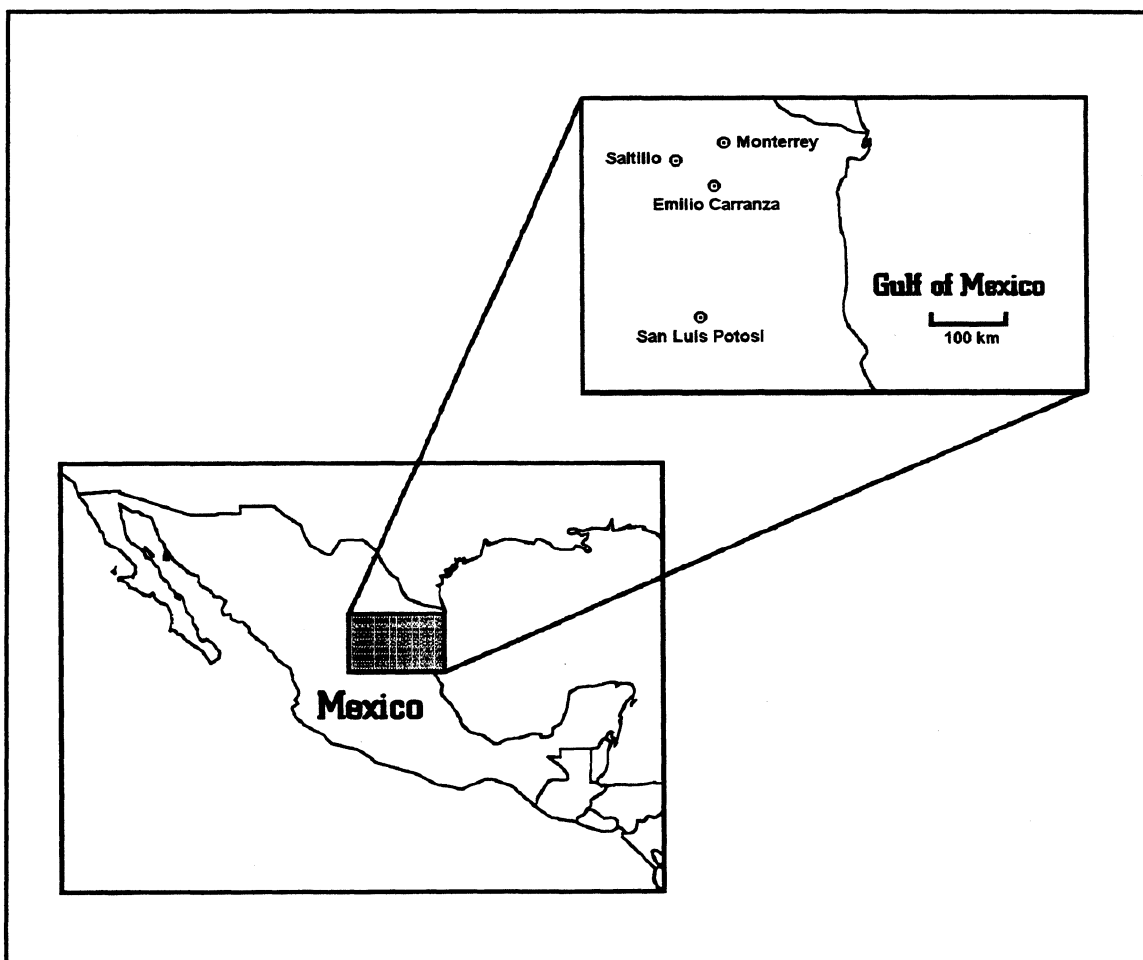
## The People and Land

Emilio Carranza is an *ejido*, a communal unit of land created by the agrarian reforms of the 1939 Mexican Revolution. It is located approximately three hundred kilometers south of Monterrey in the Mexican state of Nuevo

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Leon (Map 1). The ejido village of Emilio Carranza is twenty-eight kilometers north of the *municipio*, or county seat, of Los Rayon. The village is situated in a rugged, semi-arid mountainous region. A shallow, mountain-fed river called the Rio Pilon passes next to the village. An

all-weather road passes through Emilio Carranza and allows travellers to make the trip to Monterrey relatively quickly. The road was constructed within the last twenty years. Before that time travel from the village was primarily by foot or ox carts (Gonzalez-Clements 1981).



Map 1. General location of ejido Emilio Carranza, Nuevo Leon, Mexico. Map by D. Boellstorff.

The village covered an area of approximately one square kilometer. It included two *cantinas* [convenience stores/bars], a Roman Catholic church,

and a volleyball court. Several people ran small businesses from their residences, such as carpentry and selling refreshments. Some of the local women

provided laundry services for our field school group, as well as selling their crocheted crafts to us. During the pecan season, many of the women shelled pecans at their homes (Gonzalez-Clements 1981).

Surrounding the village were several *parcelas*, small landholdings, which were used to cultivate cash crops of pecans, avocados, beans, peanuts, and corn. The *parcelas* were also used for subsistence farming and comprised the majority of the land adjacent to the village. Most of our informants resided on *parcelas*.

Water was a limited resource in the ejido, and there was a complex method of determining water rights. A series of *asequias*, water canals built by the Spanish settlers, covered the mountainside. Two days each month a *parcela* is allowed to receive irrigation water for its fields from the main *asequia* passing nearby. On those days the connecting gates to the *asequia* are opened for a twenty-four hour period and the owner of the *parcela* attempts to divert and save as much water as possible.

The *asequias* provided water for the village of Emilio Carranza as well. In the nearby town of Los Rayon, the *asequias* meandered through the backyards of households providing water for garden irrigation. The water was not potable because of the many sediments and chemicals entering during the voyage down the mountainside. While many of the houses had plumbing in Los Rayon and Emilio Carranza, the right to use the *asequias* was still demanded by the townspeople, and any mention of the

removal of this right was vehemently opposed. Los Rayon was located downstream from Emilio Carranza on the *asequias*. Drinking water for the residents of the *parcelas* who did not possess plumbing was obtained from *ojos de agua* (literally, eyes of water). There were several of these *ojos*, or springs, located along the Rio Pilon. Drinking and cooking water was never obtained from the *asequias*, although on several occasions we witnessed women rinsing their laundry in the *asequias*.

Low cost medical services were offered by the government to the villagers. Doctors in Mexico are required to provide one year of free social service after completing medical school. Two of these doctors lived in the vicinity of Emilio Carranza. One doctor lived in Los Rayon, and the other lived in a village in the ejido Pablo L. Sidar ten kilometers northeast of Emilio Carranza.

*Curanderas*, women who possessed healing knowledge, also provided a variety of medical services for the local population. *Curanderas* were especially knowledgeable about herbal remedies and provided midwife services for most of the region. Although women never identified themselves to us as *curanderas*, we met two women who were recognized as such by other members of the village.

During the preceding year "*El Seco*" [The Drought] had been plaguing the region. According to our informants it had not rained in Emilio Carranza since October of 1994. While it rained on the day we arrived at Emilio Carranza, it did not break the pattern of overall drought. Many of the plants which locals assured

me were usually abundant had not appeared in 1995. The drought affected the flowering patterns of most of the plants that had managed to stay alive. Many of the plants did not flower, while others flowered, but failed to develop the fruits people consumed or depended on as cash crops. Avocado trees were so weakened by the lack of water that the branches were unable to support the fruit. As a result the ground was littered with small, unripened avocados. These unripened avocados not only meant lost food for the *campesinos* [rural dwellers or farmers], but lost profit as well. Only those cultivated plants which were consistently irrigated managed to survive the harsh, moisture-free year. Much of the usually lush and green countryside was a barren and seared white. The Rio Pilon was considered by some informants to be at the lowest flow it had ever been.

Because of the drought many of the subsistence crops suffered due to the practice of parcelas owners watering cash crops first. As a result of this strategy a food shortage was wreaking havoc on the local population. Hard economic times were evident across the majority of the countryside.

### Field School Methods and Data Sources

The field school group spent nearly three weeks in Emilio Carranza and the surrounding area gathering information. During my research, I travelled with a translator from the community or from our field school ranks, and a companion from our group who was

studying the medical practices of the local population. Due to the shortage of time and translators, we were encouraged to work in research teams when interacting with informants. The lack of fluency in the Spanish language by most of our group created problems when we attempted to elicit information from people.

We interviewed several women and a few men, ranging in ages from 30 to 80 years old. In order to ensure that proper interviewing procedures were used, we followed the guidelines established by the University of Nebraska Institutional Review Board. None of the people we interviewed indicated they would be adversely affected by providing us with information. All of the interviewees had lived within the region for the majority of their lives, and most of them maintained gardens near their homes.

We generally visited informants in their places of residence and spent time discussing the various plants that they utilized on a regular basis. Occasionally, the informants would mention plants that were rarely used and required a great amount of travelling or trading to obtain. Such plants were usually used in the treatment of less common ailments.

I requested a sample of a plant from informants when they discussed the plant's uses. Often these samples came from the informant's own garden. Most households had a garden under the care of the woman of the house. Occasionally a plant used by informants would come from the wild *sierras* [mountains].

Plant samples were collected, pressed, and assigned distinguishing numbers. The samples were stored in a

plant press and returned to the United States for further study. Due to the ongoing drought, many plants under discussion were not available for collection, and many others had not produced the flowers which are generally required to make positive identifications between species. The larger plants used by the local informants could not be usefully sampled, so I took photographs instead.

While collecting specimens I directed questions to the informants concerning the plant's use in medical practice, food preparation, or the fabrication of tools. It became apparent that several plants were grown solely for aesthetic purposes, so specimens of these species were also included in my collection. I asked the informants to explain the different categories they used when grouping plants and how they determined which plants would go in those categories. Their responses were collected in a master notebook and later transcribed as my field notes. During many of my conversations with informants, I was permitted to use a tape recorder to create a permanent audio record. At the conclusion of the field school period the Spanish audio tapes were translated into English after my return to the United States. I also conducted a literature review of other ethnobotanical analyses relevant to the samples I brought from Mexico. In some cases, plant names other than local names could not be determined.

## Ethnobotanical Data from the Village of Emilio Carranza

Informants loosely grouped the plants into four categories that can be labelled: *mata*, a garden plant; *hierba*, a medicinal plant; *planta*, anything which is planted; and *huerta*, the orchard and any wild plants within it. Many plants may fall into multiple categories. A few plants were gathered in the Sierra Madre, the mountain range surrounding the village. These plants did not easily fall into any of the categories listed above, and were generally referred to as *hierbas de la sierra*, literally: herbs of the rugged mountains. If plants from the Sierra Madre had a purpose, people would collect and grow it within their gardens.

### Matas

Due to the drought conditions many of the plants which normally would be present throughout the countryside and in the gardens had not survived. Many vegetables, such as onions, tomatoes, and chilies, did not produce fruit in the summer of 1995. Some informants reported that people were experiencing hunger because of a shortage of garden produce.

Numerous plants in the *mata* category were grown specifically as food for the household (Table 1). Occasionally, the yield from these plants would exceed the needs of the household, and some of the produce was sold at the market. Because of the drought-induced shortages, many households were relying on

pre-packaged foods purchased at the local cantinas.

Fruits which ripened during the warm summer months were stored for the winter in an efficient manner. *Duraznos* [peaches], *manzanas* [apples], *membrillos*, and a variety of other fruits were preserved by the following procedure:

Ripe fruit was sliced and boiled in a bucket. The fruit was then ground up and the pulp collected in a large pot. Sugar was added to the pureed fruit and the mixture was cooked over an open flame, being constantly stirred. When the pulp liquified, the pot was removed from the fire and the contents allowed to cool. When cool, the pulp hardened into a firm mass which could be cut into squares for storage in glass jars.

Table 1. Mata Category Plants Grown Specifically for Food

Spanish Name	English Name	Genus species
<i>naranjas</i>	oranges	<i>Citrus</i> spp.
<i>manzanas</i>	apples	<i>Zuelania guidonia</i>
<i>duraznos</i>	peaches	<i>Prunus persica</i>
<i>limones</i>	lemon-lime cross	<i>Citrus</i> spp.
<i>cebollas</i>	onions	<i>Allium sepa</i>
<i>cilantro</i>	parsley	<i>Coriandrum sativum</i>
<i>ejotes or frijoles</i>	beans	<i>Phaseolus</i> spp.
<i>repollo</i>	cabbage	<i>Brassica oleracea</i>
<i>calabaza</i>	squash	<i>Morinda</i> spp.
<i>higo</i>	figs	<i>Fiscus</i> spp.
<i>aguacates</i>	avocados	<i>Persea americana</i>
<i>chiles</i>	chilies	<i>Capsicum</i> spp.
<i>maiz</i>	corn	<i>Zea mays</i>
<i>membrillos</i>	quince	<i>Cydonia oblonga</i>
<i>tomate</i>	tomatoes	<i>Lycopersicon</i> spp.
<i>calabacin</i>	zucchini	
<i>chauta</i>		<i>Roseocactus</i> spp.
<i>cacahuates</i>	peanuts	<i>Arachis hypogaea</i>
<i>papas</i>	potatoes	<i>Solanum tuberosum</i>
<i>granada</i>	pomegranates	<i>Passiflora choconiana</i>
<i>hierbaniz</i>		
<i>uvas</i>	grapes	<i>Ampelocissus acapulcensis</i>

Other cultivated matas would be used primarily for decorating households or to adorn people. Matas used mostly for aesthetic purposes included roses (*Rosa* spp.), geraniums, gloria trees, *camarons* (*Caesalpinia pulcherrima*), *mineturas*, *rosallos*, and *pelor de mayo*. When a marriage ceremony occurred, the flowers from the women's gardens would be used to decorate the church and adorn the bride. Any type of flower in bloom was used. No special connotation associated with individual types of flowers was recorded.

### Plantas from the Monte

Several plants used by members of the local population grew high on the dry, nonarable land called the *monte*. Three such plants included the *maguey* [century plant] (*Agave americana*), *nopal* [prickly pear cactus] (*Opuntia* spp.), and *lechuguilla* (*Agave lehmanniana*). The monte plants were strong species that were available for utilization by the local population practically year-round.

Many informants intentionally included the maguey plant within their gardens for ease of access to this valuable resource. It was considered one of the most useful plants available. Several methods for using this plant had been passed down from previous generations, and this continuing practice was a testimony to its use by the people over the centuries (Fig. 1).

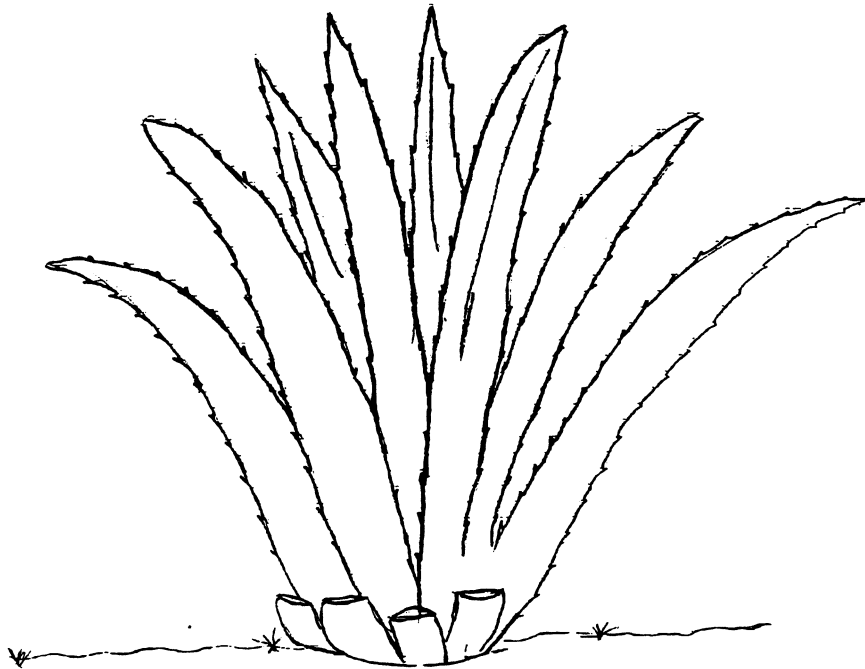
Maguey was used medicinally as a cure to reduce the swelling of joints. In order to use this cure, the people would

first remove the sharp pointed thorns (leaves), from the large maguey stem. The stem was then fried on a stove or directly in a fire until the juicy center was boiling. The stem was then cooled to the touch, and then sliced lengthwise to expose the maximum amount of the center of the stem. The exposed stem was then wrapped around the afflicted joint, with the inner surface of the maguey pressed against the patient's skin. A towel was wrapped around the stem and joint to keep the two firmly joined. The informants reported that the swelling would be dramatically reduced within a few hours.

Another medical remedy from the maguey ensured that cuts recently received on the skin were kept free from infection. The tender part of the plant beneath the bud, referred to as the heart, was mashed and combined with either coffee grinds or ground limestone. The mixture was then smeared upon the wound and covered with a dry towel. The remedy is renewed every eight to twelve hours, and according to informants, within fifteen days the wound would be dry and free of infection. One informant noted that the best maguey plants to use for this treatment were the small, young plants which were no taller than one meter rather than the larger maguey plants which could reach three meters in height.

In turn, remedies have been developed to cure problems caused by the maguey plant. The maguey's tough, tiny spines which grow on the stem are dangerously sharp. Once they enter a person's body they are extremely difficult





**Figure 1. Maguey (*Agave americana*)**

to remove. A local cure for removing the spine when it is too deeply buried is to heat a slice of onion or a clove of garlic and place it over the thorn's point of entry. The onion or garlic is pressed firmly against the wound with a covering of aluminum foil. After a short period the thorn will slowly be drawn out of the wound by the onion or garlic. However, if the thorn is too firmly lodged within the body, a slight probe at the area on the skin where the thorn is trapped will encourage it to exit the body.

Residents obtained a sweet-tasting water, called *agua de miel* [honey water], from the maguey plant. *Agua de miel* was

drained from the heart of the maguey plant, the point located just above the base of the maguey. *Agua de miel* could be consumed immediately as a refreshment, or stored until being distilled into the alcoholic beverage *tequila*. The liquid could be placed in a bucket and covered with a lid. After a few days, it would turn into a sugary substance that informants used instead of sugarcane. Tough meat soaked in a bucket of fresh *agua de miel* for a short period would be tenderized. The maguey plant itself can also be utilized as food. The tender heart can be ground into a paste and rolled into small balls approximately two centimeters

in diameter. The balls of maguey are then eaten as sweet treats.

The second plant which grows abundantly in the sierra and has many interesting uses is the nopal (Fig. 2). This plant would often be found growing wild in the countryside surrounding the village. Nopales were mainly used for two different purposes. First, the large, oval stems of the nopal could be eaten by both humans and livestock. In order to prepare the nopales for human consumption, the thin spiny thorns were scraped from the stem. The stem was diced into cubes approximately one-half centimeter long and boiled with a combination of onions, chilies, peppers, and eggs. Informants noted that nearly any food item could be added to this culinary combination, and the resulting meal was served with tortillas.

Nopales could also be used to remove silt from the water that was gathered from the river or asequia. The thorns of the nopal were first removed by scraping with a machete or other sharp blade. The oval stem was sliced lengthwise to expose as much of the gummy, inner side as possible. The sliced halves were then placed (gummy-side down) in a bucket of silty water. Within an hour, much of the sediment in the water would be absorbed into the nopal stem. Members of our field school group observed two of the local residents demonstrate the technique, but no results were discernable to us. The water still seemed to be as brown as chocolate.

The third plant which grew in the sierra was the lechuguilla. Within the stems of this plant were tough fibers called *ixtle*. Local residents removed *ixtle*

from the lechuguilla plant in order to make a variety of tools. *Ixtle* could be used to make *peines* (dish brushes), brooms, hairbrushes, and rope. We watched one woman use *ixtle* as a stuffing for a doll she was crocheting. *Ixtle* processing was a source of income for many men in the both villages of Los Rayon and Emilio Carranza. *Ixtle* was purchased in bulk by the federal government from the local population as a type of welfare system. We observed several houses and chicken coops constructed using *ixtle* rope and the bamboo that grew in the wild marsh area beside the river.

Many of the trees which grew wildly or were cultivated by the campesinos were utilized as wood sources. *Nogal* [walnut] (*Juglans* spp.), *sabino* [cypress] (*Cupressus* spp.), and *encinas* [oak] (*Lithocarpus* spp.) trees were considered by most informants as the best woods for making heavy furniture such as tables and benches. Walnut was considered by some informants to be a good material to make axes and other tools used on a parcela. Since it is illegal to cut down trees in Mexico, some people would intentionally attempt to kill a tree. Usually, they would do this by starting a fire along the base of a tree. Members of our field school group witnessed this activity on more than one occasion. The wood gained from this practice was generally used as fire wood or in the construction of furniture. Growing abundantly on many of the trees in the wild, especially the mesquite trees, was *paistley* [Spanish Moss] (*Tillandsia usneoides*). *Paistley* was frequently used as a mattress stuffing because it was

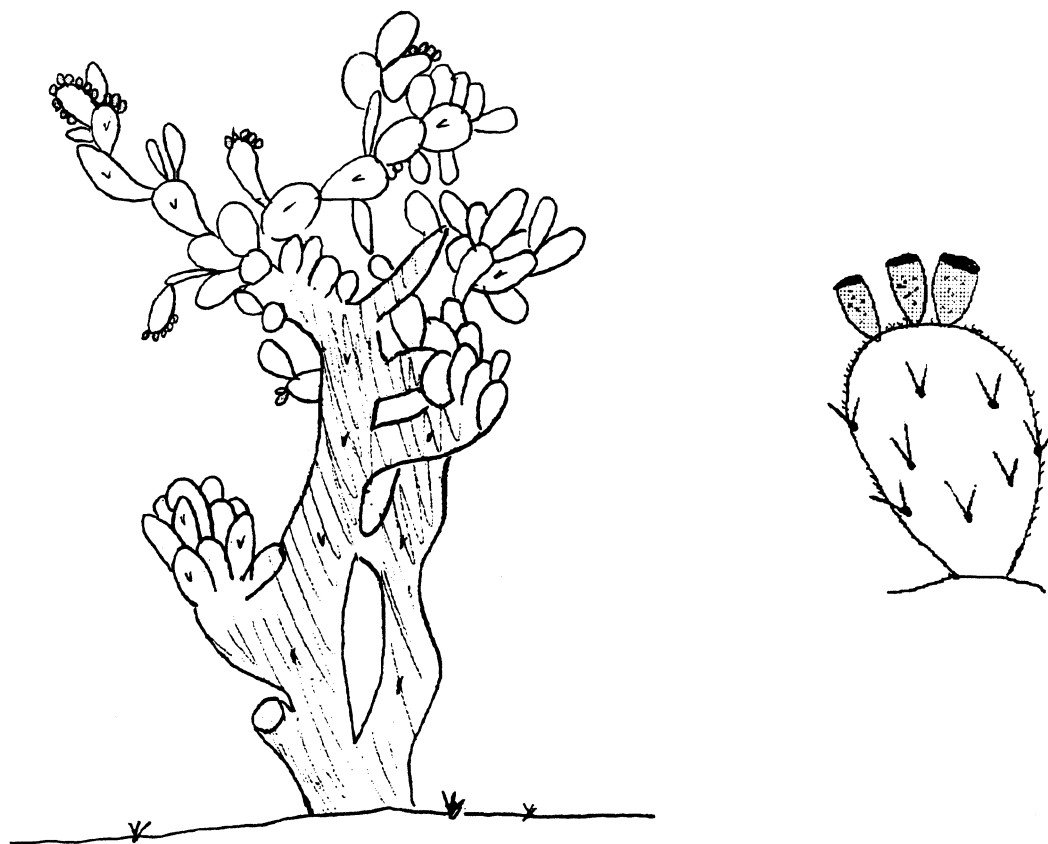


Figure 2. Nopal (*Opuntia* spp.), with detail of oval stem showing thorns and fruit.

extremely soft and possessed a fresh appealing scent. One midwife preferred her patients to give birth on beds stuffed with paistley. She advocated this because the soiled paistley could be thrown away, the mattress cover could be washed, and then refilled with fresh paistley. This practice saved the mattress from being ruined during the process of childbirth.

### Hierbas and the Curandera

Frequently a visit to a curandera preceded a trip to a doctor practicing western medicine when a person had medical problems. If a curandera knew

how to cure an ailment, she would offer her services. If not, she would send the patient to see the local physician. The curandera's treatment often involved a combination of the many hierbas growing in her garden. When curanderas dispensed medicine for their patients, they had three basic methods. If the patient's problem was located within the body, such as a stomachache or a headache, the curandera generally recommended a tea. Exterior problems such as cuts and bruises were treated by topical solutions. Mental disorders, such as extreme fright, were treated through ritualistic healing processes.

Many of the hierbas were administered in the form of teas. The entire leafy stem of a plant was boiled, then a cup of the tea was consumed by the patient. Teas were used to cure a plethora of ailments, and the preference of which hierba to utilize was generally based on availability or taste. If a patient suffered from a stomach pain, a curandera could recommend a tea made of *romero* [rosemary] (*Rosmarinus officinalis*), *sacar de limon* [chirchweed] (*Pectis* spp.), or *manzanilla* [camomile] (*Matricaria* spp.). Intestinal problems were treated with a tea made from an *istafiate* [artemisia] (*Artemisia* spp.) stem mixed with a mashed avocado seed.

For a pregnant woman with stomach pains, there were three different teas which were considered good remedies. According to one of our sources, the most effective tea was made of manzanilla, *hierba buena* (*Mentha piperita*), and *canela* [cinnamon] (*Cinnamomum* spp.). The other two were combinations of romero and manzanilla stems or hierba buena and *mentha* [mint] (*Mentha* spp.).

One informant told us of a cure for a woman who was bleeding at the wrong time of her menstrual cycle. Pecan shells saved from earlier harvests would be boiled in a large pot until the water turned a deep, dark red. The pot would be removed from the heat, and the tea allowed to cool. A glass full of lukewarm tea was consumed by the afflicted woman. According to informants, the tea's thick, gummy consistency closed the pores of the vagina, thereby halting the bleeding. This was an old remedy used prior to the arrival of western medicine,

and is still practiced by some of the elder members of the village.

When a patient had difficulty sleeping, teas made from *polayo* (*Mentha* spp.), orange leaves, *betonica* (*Betonica* spp.), mentha, or romero were recommended. All of these plants, with the exception of betonica, were usually found within a household's garden. Betonica was found in the sierra, and was usually obtained through trade. One of the members of our field school group drank a cup of tea made from the polayo when sleep was elusive, but reported it had little effect.

Pains occurring within the chest and heart region were treated with a tea made from sacar de limon or *ruda* [rue] (*Ruta graveolens*). A combination of *geranio de alor* [geranium] (*Pelargonium* spp.) and *albaca* (*Ocimum* spp.) was also used to relieve these pains. The curandera recommended a tea made from a stem of *toronjil* (*Agastache mexicana*) to reduce high blood pressure.

A persistent cough was treated with a tea made from bougainvillea (*Bougainvillea* spp.) flowers or hierba buena stems. If the cough was stimulated by colic or lung infection, a tea made from combining manzanilla, albaca, toronjil, and artemisia stems was prepared. A toothache remedy used by the curandera included rubbing a commercial topical analgesic ointment such as Vicks Vaporub® on the face of a *nastuerzo* [nasturtium] (*Tropaeolum majus*) leaf and placing the leaf against the patient's cheek. The leaf was positioned near the tooth which was causing the pain. Patient's suffering from headaches who

did not have access to aspirin were given the same treatment. However, if aspirin was available, people generally preferred to use the commercial chemical remedy rather than the herbal remedy.

Despite a food shortage crisis occurring at the time of our summer field school at Emilio Carranza, several local residents were concerned about their weight and sought ways to relieve themselves of a few extra pounds. A curandera recommended a tea made from the root of the *madronian morado* boiled in water. Drinking the tea in place of water during the day was reported to reduce a person's weight.

An earache was usually cured with the leaves from a ruda plant. The leaves were rolled and placed within the aching inner ear. A cotton ball was placed over the leaves to hold them in place. Within a few hours the earache treatment is expected to affect a cure. Ruda leaves were also used to stimulate miscarriages in women wishing to end their pregnancy. While within the first trimester of pregnancy, a tea made from the ruda leaves could be consumed along with two aspirin. Informants reported the unwanted fetus would be flushed from the body within two or three days. A related ruda treatment had been available to women in the United States during the nineteenth century. "Regulatory pills" made with ruda were used by women to regulate late arriving menstrual cycles.

A plant which grew in the wild, but was frequently included within a garden, was *sabila* [aloe vera] (*Aloe vera*). *Sabila* had a variety of medical purposes. When a person was suffering from a sore throat, the gummy inside portion of the *sabila*

stem was removed and lightly warmed. The heated *sabila* was then used as a topical application on a sore throat. *Sabila* could also be used to relieve swollen joints in the same manner as the maguey stems mentioned earlier. That is, the stems were sliced lengthwise, heated, and wrapped directly on the affected joints. Informants noted that both methods were equally effective in the reduction of the swollen joints. The *sabila* stem could be diced and boiled into a tea and consumed to relieve symptoms associated with asthma. Some informants have also eaten *sabila* after it has been prepared in the same manner as the nopal cactus. However, the *sabila* has an unappealing texture which was described as "slimy".

A sore throat plaguing our field school group provided us with the opportunity to seek practical remedial information. We were treated with various methods by several people. A tea made from manzanilla stems was consumed to relieve the pain within a patient's throat. As mentioned above, lightly heated *sabila* stems could be applied to the outside of the throat to relieve pain. Slices of tomato were used for the same purpose. The sore throat left the group after we consumed the tea prepared for us from manzanilla.

*Ajo* [garlic] (*Allium sativum*), generally obtained through trade, was used quite frequently for a variety of purposes. Its primary use was as a seasoning for foods to bring out the flavor of the dish. However, garlic also had non-food applications for the local population. If a hiker rubbed the juice from a tender garlic on his or her boots, the garlic would

act as a snake repellent. One informant cured our entire field school group of numerous insect bites by rubbing garlic juice over the welts. After a brief moment of burning pain, the welts stopped itching. Within twenty-four hours of application, the insect bites dried up and disappeared.

When someone experienced a sudden, severe fright a curandera was asked to "sweep" the fear away. This represented a method of spiritually removing the fears plaguing the patient. The curandera's first action was to collect a trio of aromatic herbs, usually some combination of *mirto* [myrtle] (*Myrtus* spp.) and *pirul* (*Schinus molle*), ruda, romero, or geranio. If it was a fright of the heart, a red geranio would be included in the bunch of hierbas for the sweeping. When a curandera was sweeping a baby, she generally would use mirto, ruda, and pirul. For some treatments the curandera would bypass the herbs and use eggs or bones instead. However, herbs were sufficient to cure most frights.

A fright patient would lie down on a bed and have his/her entire body covered with a cotton sheet. With the herbs clutched in her hands, and reciting Roman Catholic prayers, the curandera would sweep the body of the patient from head to toe several times. According to people who have experienced a sweeping treatment, the sheet acts as a trap, collecting the aroma of the herbs being passed over the patient and creating a form of aromatherapy.

## Conclusion

This paper provides a brief overview of the rich ethnobotanical data available for study in the mestizo village of Emilio Carranza. Plants play a very important role in the lives of the people in this northeastern region of Mexico. Their lives seemingly revolve around the plants surrounding them in the imposing beauty of the mountains. Plants provide village members with most of their food, many medicines, some tools, and decorations for their homes. All of the homes had garden plots used to produce plant materials for the household. I did not encounter a single one household lacking a garden.

Curanderas rely heavily upon their knowledge of plants, and provide a valuable service for the community. Only older members of the community were considered to be curanderas by other people in the community, and it was mainly the older people who possessed the knowledge of the usefulness of the plants. Some informants claim that hierbas growing within their gardens are simply used for decoration, while others claim they have great medicinal value. These disparities about the uses of plants occur frequently, since much of the knowledge is passed orally from the older to younger generations, most especially by the mothers. As a result the use of some hierbas differs from household to household. Many parents boast of their children who left the village to pursue careers in towns such as Monterrey and Saltillo. This exodus of the younger generation seems to suggest that much of the intricate plant knowledge may be lost

to the influx of western medicine. Already many residents claim they would much rather take a pill to cure an ache instead of using herbal remedies.

Due to the poor quality of the drought-impacted samples I brought back from Mexico, few of the plant specimens could be positively identified in the Linnaean system. With more time in the field during a non-drought year, plant specimens could be collected during their flowering stages, making it possible to accurately identify their species. The ejido presents an excellent location for researchers interested in the field of ethnobotany and ethnopharmacology. Much of the knowledge of this area is disappearing quickly due to the out-migration of an increasing number of younger people seeking better opportunities in the larger towns of northeastern Mexico. This is an emerging issue which has the possibility of becoming a knowledge crisis. This wealth of ethnobotanical knowledge could pass from the residents' hands altogether. Indigenous and local plant knowledge could be used in conjunction with western medicine to provide unique medical treatments for the global population. While much of this information is currently available, researchers need to chronicle it for the use of future generations.

## Glossary

albaca- a member of the mint family.  
Scientific: *Ocimum* sp.  
ajo- garlic. Scientific: *Allium sativum*  
asequia- water canals used to provide irrigation.

artemisia- sagebrush. Scientific: *Artemisia* sp.  
betonica- Scientific: *Betonica* sp.  
bougainvillea- Scientific: *Bougainvillea* sp.  
calabaza- gourd. Scientific: *Lagenaria* sp.  
campesino- someone who lives in the countryside and works parcelas.  
canela- cinnamon. Scientific: *Cinnamomum* spp.  
cantina- a pub or bar.  
carrizo- bamboo. Scientific: *Bambusa* sp.  
curandera- a woman who heals, usually specializing in herbal remedies.  
encina- oak tree. Scientific: *Lithocarpus* sp.  
ejido- land redistribution which occurred after the 1939 Mexican Revolution.  
geranio- geranium. Scientific: *Pelargonium* sp.  
hacendado- the landed gentry of pre-Revolution Mexico.  
hacienda- a large, agricultural plantation.  
hierba- a medicinal herb.  
hierba buena- good herb. Scientific: *Mentha pipereta*  
huaco- Scientific: *Aristolochia* sp.  
huerta- the orchard and the vegetation within its boundaries.  
istafiate- sage. Scientific: *Artemisia* sp.  
ixtle- the fiber removed from the *lechuguilla* plant.  
lechuguilla- Scientific: *Agave legheguilla*  
limon- lime. Scientific: *Citrus* sp.  
maguey- the century plant. Scientific: *Agave americana*  
manzana- apple. Scientific: *Zuelania guidonia*  
manzanilla- camomile. Scientific: *Matricaria* sp.

mata- a plant within a household's garden.

membrillo- Scientific: *Cydonia oblonga*

menta- mint. Scientific: *Mentha* spp.

mestizo- a person of mixed Indigenous (Native American) and European ancestry.

mirto- myrtle. Scientific: *Myrtus* spp.

monte- non-arable land on the mountain ridges.

municipio- a county-like political division.

nacagua- Scientific: *Cordia boissieri*

naranja- orange. Scientific: *Citrus* sp.

nastuerzo- Scientific: *Tropaeolum majus*

nogal- walnut. Scientific: *Juglans* sp.

nopal- prickly pear. Scientific: *Opuntia* sp.

nuez- pecan. Scientific: *Carya illinoensis*

ojos de agua- eye of the water. A spring which provides fresh water.

paistley- spanish moss. Scientific: *Tillandsia usneoides*

parcela- a small plot of land.

planta- any plant which is purposefully cultivated.

peon (plural: peones)- workers who were tied to the land during pre-Revolution Mexico.

pirul- Scientific: *Schinus molle*

polayo- Scientific: (*Mentha* spp.)

rio- a river.

romero- rosemary. Scientific: *Rosmarinus officinalis*

ruda- rue. Scientific: *Ruta* spp.

sabila- aloe. Scientific: *Aloe vera*

sabino- cyprus tree. Scientific: *Cupressus* spp.

sacar de limon- chichweed. Scientific: *Pectis* spp.

sierra- the wild, the mountains.

toronjil- Scientific: *Agastache mexicana*

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